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HEALTH

WITHOUT MEDICINE



THEODORE H. MEAD

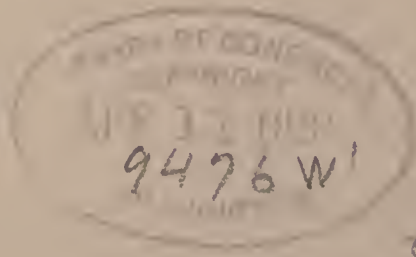
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BY

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HEALTH WITHOUT MEDICINE.



“WILL they never stop tolling that bell !” I said at last aloud, and sat up in bed. It was broad daylight, but that is the case in midsummer, even on the south coast of England, for about twenty hours out of the twenty-four ; so, pushing back the curtains which hung in English fashion from a canopy at the bedhead, I got out my watch from under the pillow. It was not yet three o’clock. Scarcely three hours had I enjoyed of much needed and much longed-for sleep, and to be roused up in this hopeless manner was discouraging indeed. Still the bell continued its steady beating. What church in Brighton could be calling to service at

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this hour of the night in such an importunate way? Finally I arose, and going to the oriel window, looked up and down the street. It lay in all the stillness, if not in the shadow, of night. Not a living creature was to be seen or heard in it, nor in the churchyard opposite, where the ancient church of gray flints, sitting long and low among its yews and elms, looked as if it must have been there from time immemorial. But, though the sashes were wide open, the sound of the ringing was no louder, and to my bewilderment did not appear to come from any particular direction, but seemed to be in the air. Struck with a sudden thought, I laid my finger on my pulse. The beats coincided with the clang of the bell ; the tolling was in my own head. My heart sank ; and I went hopelessly back to bed once more, to wait with open eyes, as many a time before, for the slow hours to pass and day at last to begin.

At breakfast I acceded finally to my host's wish to send for his own physician, with reluctance it must be confessed ; and it was not long before the gentleman in question made his appearance in the pleasant drawing-room. He was lean, muscular, red-bearded — this English doctor — and plain spoken beyond anything to which the ears of American patients are accustomed. I told him of my sleeplessness and loss of strength and shortness of breath, and how two different sorts of headaches which had tormented me at intervals for many years had now joined forces with a new and formidable ally, a heavy, dull pain in the back of the head, and among them had obliged me to give up my business and left me little peace day or night. Doubtless to his experienced eye my sunken cheek and lacklustre eye spoke as unmistakably as my words. He inquired, however, about my habits of life and work.

“Yaas,” he said, “I understand. You Americans think that it pays to burn the candle at both ends. You have been trying, like the rest of your countrymen, to do two men’s work, and this is the natural result. English moderation pays better than Yankee ‘go-aheadativeness.’ You get on pretty fast for a time, but *you can’t stay* with us. You are worn out at an age when we are in our prime. Now it is my duty to tell you that if you continue the course you have followed hitherto your life will be a short one — indeed, if you keep on as you are going just now, a very short one — and no medicine will do you any good. If all the doctors in the United States tell you anything different don’t you believe them, for it’s all rubbish. But in my opinion you can save your life yourself if you choose to take the trouble.”

“Well, doctor, ‘all that a man hath will he give for his life,’ says Job, and I am

quite of his mind. What do you wish me to do?"

"Well, in the first place, you must take a great deal more exercise, and you must give up every mental exertion not absolutely unavoidable. I would rather you did not even look at a newspaper."

"But, Doctor," I expostulated, "you don't know how much exercise I have been in the habit of taking, — a great deal more than most Americans."

"That makes no difference," said he; "you have not taken half enough, and what you have taken has not been of the right sort. Your regular, daily exercise should be severe enough to send the blood to the brain. Your brain has not been properly nourished, and there are symptoms of considerable irritation at the base of it; but in my opinion the difficulty has not yet become chronic. You can never do again, however, the work you have done in the past; that you must make up your

mind to. You must live the life of the English country gentleman, — spend as much of your time as you can in the open air, do as little thinking as possible, and no reading at all, and twice every day take exercise, especially of the upper part of the body, that will send the blood to the brain.”

These words “send the blood to the brain,” repeated with so much emphasis, struck me with the force of a revelation. Something told me that therein was the solution of the whole difficulty, and I resolved to follow the advice ; but how to begin was the problem.

“You are fond of riding ; get a saddle-horse and go up on the Downs,” said the doctor.

“But can my head bear the shaking? I have had to give up omnibuses, and even walking is painful to me. Almost all the way from Liverpool to London I stood up, and on my toes, in the railway carriage,

because the jarring otherwise was too distressing to be endured."

"You have got to fight this thing through," said he. "If you do not conquer it, it will conquer you."

"Then those cold winds on the Downs make my head ache worse, and chill me through even in my full winter clothing."

"That is only neuralgic," said he. "It is true it shows a very depressed condition of the nervous system, but if there were nothing the matter with you worse than that it would be all plain sailing. It won't do for you to go and sit in the sun as you have been doing; you must take other means of getting warm. You must seek relief from such of your headaches as are neuralgic by deadening the excessive sensibility of the superficial nerves by the use of cold water, and must warm yourself up by getting the blood in active circulation."

All this is in brief the substance of con-

sultations at intervals during two or three weeks, in the course of which I essayed to put in practice the worthy doctor's advice.

Brighton is a charming sojourn for the American who will give himself up to the pleasures and influences of the place without the indefatigable national effort to improve the mind. There are no ruins, no cathedrals, no fine buildings, no historical associations except the unsavoury memories of George the Fourth still hanging about the Pavilion; but the steep and crooked streets have an agreeable quaintness, with their little brick and stuccoed houses bright with flowers; from the higher portions the view is most picturesque of the gray town and the blue, restless channel; the shops along "the front," on the handsome street by the water, fronting the broad promenade bounded by the sea wall, have an air of taste uncommon in England, and rather French than British; the very throngs of

visitors, who raise the population from its usual eighty thousand up to a hundred and twenty thousand in the season, add a cheerful vivacity to the scene ; while the broad, shingly beach below the sea-wall, with its multitudinous life and its fleets of oddly rigged boats, is a place I never tired of. Then there are picturesque and ancient villages to visit, with their little old churches standing all day long with open doors ; and above the town the South Downs, where one can ride for miles up against the sky, over the long green swells of turf, and often, as far as the eye can reach, see not a house or fence or tree or even shrub, and not a living creature but the rooks and gulls or perhaps a shepherd with dog and flock. So I explored the town, and drove with my friends over the beautiful roads as smooth as a floor, and rode a capital little bay hunter, though with a pang at every step, over the aforesaid Downs, and

subscribed to the gymnasium, and bought tickets for the "Royal Tepid Swimming Baths," and in short overdid the matter so thoroughly that I was presently laid snugly up within doors for a fortnight. It was discouraging, but the faith was strong within me that though my undue haste had got me a tumble, I had found the clew which would bring me out of my labyrinth of troubles; and I presently returned to my American home intending, if necessary, to abandon business altogether and bend every energy to the recovery of my health.

About three years have elapsed since that memorable visit to Brighton; and now, instead of abandoning business, I am able to give it, without fatigue, as much time as necessary. Instead of lying awake half the night or more after an hour's reading, I can study or work till eleven o'clock, sleep like a top, and wake refreshed in the morning. I can eat what

I like, always of course in moderation. I have gained thirty pounds, nearly all solid muscle. Furthermore,—and this is a detail which will interest valetudinarians,—the action of my heart, which had become alarmingly weak, has gained strength, and there is a perceptible and considerable increase in the capacity of the lungs. As for headache, or any other ache, I do not have such a thing once a month.

A result like this, in the case of a man already well advanced in life, is certainly remarkable ; and there must be many who feel themselves or fear themselves to be physically on the downward road, but know not how to turn back, who would be glad to hear how it was accomplished. Such will be encouraged to learn that it was the work of nothing more miraculous than patience and common-sense. The cure, or treatment, has consisted simply of exercise, cold bathing, and abstinence from drugs and stimulants ; and if we

Americans could only fully appreciate the value of these simple and inexpensive agencies, it would be of incalculable advantage to the national health and to our well-being, mental, moral, and physical. To men and women, to all ages, to all classes, they would be of equal value. In the case of persons in feeble health, indeed, these agencies, natural and harmless as they appear, must be made use of with care and judgment ; and if the reader will pardon the apparent egotism, I will continue to use the first person and to give my own personal experience as the best means of bringing the matter home to him, as one not only in which he should be interested, but in which he, perhaps, has actually a duty to perform to himself or to others.

My stay in England was protracted some two months after leaving Brighton, and I occupied the time in little journeyings hither and thither, spending the

Sundays, whenever possible, in the delightful Cathedral cities. Dumb-bells, Indian clubs, and such gymnastic appliances were manifestly impossible under the circumstances ; so I arranged a series of exercises which might be carried on in any bedroom, without noise or jar, and these, with a few modifications, have served me ever since. Nobody who has not actually tried the experiment knows how great a bore such exercises are, and how almost irresistible is the temptation to omit them now and then,—and that, too, with the conviction that such omission is only the first step toward total neglect. To diminish in some degree their tiresomeness, it occurred to me to make a systematic effort to increase my personal symmetry by developing those muscles—and there were plenty of them—which were conspicuously deficient. My success in this effort, I will confess to the sympathetic reader, has

given me a pleasure which, it is to be feared, might be considered childish by some of my friends, but which has certainly made perseverance easier to me. For economy of time, I have found it best in the morning to do part of the work before my bath and in the intervals of preparation for it, and part of it afterward while dressing. In this way my toilet occupies, from the time of getting up till I sit down to breakfast, just about an hour; sometimes more, sometimes less, for I have to avoid setting the heart beating too violently, as well as getting in too profuse a perspiration.

The exercises in question are the following; and I take them in the order given, being careful before beginning each one to stand perfectly straight with the breast thrown forward, and to draw a deep breath. Observe that the clothing should be loose and of some light woollen material.

1. Sit down on both heels, and, rising suddenly, spring as high as possible into the air, alighting without noise on the toes. At first, twice, finally ten times.

2. Stretch the arms out straight and rigid in front, horizontally, with clenched fists turned palm downward, and swing them up and down vigorously, at the same time moving them gradually apart, always without bending the elbow, till they are as far back as possible. Begin with ten times and increase gradually to forty-six times up and down, with each arm.

This builds up the muscle on the top of the shoulder, and is therefore an exercise useful to men and boys whose shoulders are too sloping, but it will naturally be less used by women.

3. Stand erect and spring up off the floor, straightening the leg and changing at each spring the position of the feet by placing first one in advance and then the other. Alight as noiselessly as possible.

At first ten times, increasing gradually to forty-six times for each foot.

This exercise is especially good for the calves, and therefore equally advantageous for men and women. My own practice is to do it at the same time as No. 2.

4. Stretch the arms out in front as in No. 2. and swing them horizontally backward and forward, bringing them forward as swiftly as possible, as if to strike them together, but stopping them when the hands are about six inches apart. Beginning with ten, increase gradually to forty-six times.

This develops the muscle of the breast between the ribs and the shoulder, filling up the ungraceful hollows too often seen there, while at the same time expanding the chest ; and it is therefore especially to be recommended to those who are inclined to be round-shouldered.

5. Draw the fists up in front of the

shoulders, and strike forward as forcibly as possible, first with one and then with the other, by suddenly straightening the arm. Begin with ten and increase to forty-six times with each.

This, while working the pectoral muscles, especially develops those at the back of the upper arm, and will therefore recommend itself to the ladies.

6. Stand erect and kick each foot alternately up behind as high and as quickly as possible. Begin with ten and increase gradually to forty-six times with each foot.

This develops especially the calves and the back of the thigh, tending to increase the symmetry of the leg.

My practice is to do this one at the same time as No. 5, — a combination which will be found to set the blood in active circulation with great promptness.

7. Stand firmly on the left foot, step forward about a yard with the right,

keeping the left knee straight, but bending the right so that the leg below the knee will be vertical, precisely as when making a lunge in fencing. Now lean forward, touch both hands to the floor, and raise them, without bending the elbows, as high above the head as possible ; touch them again to the floor, and resume your upright position. Now do the same stepping forward with the left foot and keeping the right knee unbent. Begin with three times each and increase to ten times on each foot.

This is a sort of universal strengthener, and if well and energetically done with the proper muscular tension, will have a powerful effect on back, loins, and abdomen, as well as on legs and arms. When at home I use dumb-bells of sixteen pounds each for this exercise, diminishing the number to five times on each foot.

8. Stand erect and swing the arms swiftly and alternately in circles, striking

out as forcibly as possible with each fist at a point about forty-five degrees above the level of the shoulder. To make this exercise at once profitable and graceful, the circles should be true and in the same vertical plane; that is, the arms should not be thrown carelessly about, but should pass close in front of the person. Begin with twenty times and increase to seventy with each arm. When at home, I use long and slender Indian clubs of three pounds weight each, in which case I swing them each forty-six times. For children I would recommend clubs of one pound, and for women no heavier, but longer ones.

9. The same as No. 8, but reversed. Swing each arm in the opposite direction, striking out at a point about forty-five degrees below the level of the shoulder. Begin with twenty times and increase to seventy, or with Indian clubs to forty-six.

10. Swing the clubs as in No. 9, but

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behind the back, striking out so as to straighten the arm in the same manner. Begin with five and increase to twenty times each.

11. Swing the clubs as in No. 10, but behind the back. Begin with two and increase to ten each.

All the exercises with the clubs should be favourites with the ladies, as they round the arms and shoulders and fill out the upper part of the breast, while they have a most beneficial influence on the whole upper part of the body.

12. Stand erect with the feet close together ; raise the open hands as high as possible ; then bow downward, with the head between the arms, without bending the knees ; touch the fingers to the floor, or come as near to it as you can. Do this at first once, and increase to five times. I could not reach the floor at all when I began, but can now lay my open palms upon it.

This exercise is excellent for the muscles of the stomach and bowels, and very developing to those of the back, leg and thigh.

13. Stand firmly on the left foot, and, with the knees unbent, raise the right foot as high as you can and hold it so for a few seconds. Now do the same with the left. Then again raising the right foot carry it around horizontally to the right till it is straight behind, keeping it as high as possible ; and then bring it back in the same way. Do the same with the left.

These exercises develop the front thigh and train the hip muscles.

14. Place both hands against the wall, standing some little distance back, and with the knees unbent, lean forward till the breast touches it, then push yourself as far back as possible. Begin with three or four times and continue till you can do it ten times, substituting a couple of chairs for the wall.

This is excellent for breast and arm muscles.

15. Stand erect, stretch out the right foot and sit gradually down on the left heel, and rise up again without touching the floor with the right foot or with the hands; then do the same on the other foot. At first do this once on each foot, and gradually increase to five times on each foot. Keep the lungs inflated, the head up, the shoulders back.

This exercise strengthens the knees and develops the front of the thigh; it has also a powerful and beneficial effect on the concealed muscles of the loins and abdomen. It had better, however, by ladies and persons in delicate health, be begun with both feet, and so continued a considerable time.

I have stated above what I usually go through with from beginning to end twice a day, taking for my evening course the

hour before dinner. Especial reference has been had to the advice of my good English doctor, to exercise particularly the upper part of the body, and in a manner to send the blood to the brain. Almost any active young fellow would go through the whole list in fifteen minutes, perhaps ten; it takes me at least twenty and usually more. At the same time the doctor's excellent counsel to live as much as possible out of doors has not been forgotten. While still in England I began by renouncing cabs and going everywhere on my own feet, and, as it presently appeared, much more agreeably and with very little loss of time. In this country the climate does not lend itself in the same degree to out-door exercises, but I find no difficulty in walking or riding on horseback with pleasure and profit in all but the very hottest days of summer, and I see no reason to doubt that the same would be the case with the great

majority of my fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

To return to our in-door exercises, it is evident that others might with equal advantage be chosen by persons of a different physical conformation ; and a good book to consult on the subject is the simple and practical little work, "How to get Strong," by William Blaikie. Whatever the selection may be, however, a few points must receive the greatest attention.

In the first place a beginning must be made with great care and moderation, particularly by persons in delicate health. The number of repetitions of each exercise given in my list, is that which seems to suit me best ; but this is a point which each one must settle for himself. The best costume is a suit of wool, a bathing-dress for instance ; and until hardened to the exposure, it is well between the exercises to put on a light dressing-gown in which to walk about and to recover breath.

When you have finished, strip and rub the skin dry and warm with a rough towel.

Let the exercises be sufficiently severe to flush the face and start the perspiration ; and between them do not throw yourself into an easy-chair, but walk up and down with head erect and shoulders thrown back, drawing long and deep inspirations. While exercising, stand straight, with head high and lungs fully distended. In this way, besides the advantage of the increased supply to the blood of oxygen, which is the best of tonics, the new acquisitions of muscle will be adapted to keep the chest expanded, instead of holding it contracted and compressed as would otherwise be the case.

In forbidding the use of medicine, my English doctor was willing to make but one exception ; and that was in favour of a little calisaya bark and nux vomica, to be used occasionally, but only occasionally, as a tonic ; and I may here say that on

this point, as on every other, the wisdom of his advice — which cost me, if my memory is correct, just three pounds three shillings — has been justified in my case in every particular. We are most of us inclined to attribute to medicine an influence almost magical upon the human system, — an influence which a little reflection would show us is quite beyond its powers ; and I must confess that I, for one, should be really ashamed to write down here a list of the drugs of all sorts which I myself have taken, on what might certainly be considered the best advice to be had in this country. Unquestionably they did me, as they have doubtless done most other people, more harm than good.

In forbidding stimulants of all kinds, my good doctor again made but one exception, and this time in favour of the English national beverage, *tea*, to be used morning and evening, but even this with moderation. As for all the others, I had

used them always sparingly, and it cost me no effort to give them up, with one notable reservation, — how in the world was I to make a breakfast without my coffee? It certainly was dry work at first; and many times, if I had given way to impulse, the teapot would have taken flight out of the window, for the very sight of it in the morning was exasperating; but repeated experiments — for this point was not yielded without a struggle — have convinced me that coffee predisposes to neuralgic headaches, even if it does not actually bring them on.

The cold sponge-bath, at first somewhat dreaded, soon came to be considered a luxury, and for many a day has taken rank with me among the necessities of life. To what extent this is the case among our cousins over the water, those of us can best judge who have seen the batteries of tubs (looking, as the children always discover, like immense tin hats)

waiting to be sent into the bed-rooms of the hotels. In fact the sponge-bath has become, we might almost say, a domestic fine art in England. On going to our room at night in an English house, we find the material for it established there as a matter of course, and what a picture it brings to our eyes of a sort of domestic service which seems almost too near the ideal ever to be quite realized in our own homes. How swiftly and quietly the tidy, buxom chambermaid brings in the unwieldly vessel; how deftly she places it upon a cloth spread on the floor, and approaching a chair throws completely over it a large, thick towel, while she lays at hand the soap and rough towels for friction, and demurely asks, "Is there anything else, sir?"

However, these harmless-looking implements, or their equivalents, must be used by all beginners with care, — by persons of delicate health with very great care;

for otherwise they are capable of working results directly the opposite of those desired. In the first place, see to it that the room is warm and free from draughts. Then begin operations with water scarcely cooler than that you have been in the habit of using for warm baths, and after squeezing it copiously over head and shoulders with a big two-handed sponge, get out as quickly as you got in, and rub briskly from head to foot with a rough towel. By and by you can amuse yourself by polishing up your skin and seeing it grow white and fine, with no more apprehension of ill effects from exposure than have the boys who in summer scramble out of the water and scamper naked along some river bank ; but at present get into your clothes without delay. Next day you may lower the temperature of the water, but not more than two degrees, and continue doing so till you have reached the point at which it seems to

do you most good, probably somewhere about seventy degrees Fahrenheit. It is well always to put a thermometer into the water, as you cannot judge even approximately by dipping in the hand. If you do not get a healthy reaction, indicated by a pleasurable glow, or if after a half hour or so your hands or feet get cold, there has been something amiss; either the water has been too cold or you have been too deliberate or the room has not been warm enough.

I trust the reader will pardon what may seem to be a lack of good taste in speaking thus at length of my private experience. If my suggestions are of service to any one, I shall feel repaid for the effort which it has cost me to do so. It must be evident to every one that if the effects described have been produced in the case of a man already past maturity, much greater may be expected in young persons, perhaps almost in proportion to their youth.

In imperfectly developed boys and girls it is probable that by good judgment, watchful care, and perseverance, a complete physical transformation may be effected; and parents would do well to give the matter timely thought. For them Mr. Blaikie's little book, "Sound Bodies for our Boys and Girls," will be found a valuable adviser.

NEW YORK, October, 1889.

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